

# IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Cow stoppers can be a useful method of achieving a pregnancy in dairy cows which have failed to conceive. **Wendy Short** speaks to vet, Gemma Dobson of the Paragon Veterinary Group in Cumbria to find out how they work

## What is a cow stopper?

\* A cow stopper is a term to describe an embryo implanted into a cow which has failed to conceive naturally.

It is inserted into the cow's uterus, using the standard technique for embryo transfer.

The insertion of a cow stopper is a non-surgical procedure, but it must be performed by a vet, or other trained person.

An epidural anaesthetic is administered to relax the muscles and minimise any discomfort.

Cow stoppers for dairy cows are usually easy-calving beef breed embryos, to allow the clear identification of any resulting calf.

The producer can then be certain whether the cow conceived via other means, or the successful pregnancy was due to the cow stopper.

## When should they be used?

\* On some farms, cow stoppers are reserved for repeat breeder females, which are highly valued for their milk yield and/or quality and the owner wishes to retain them in the



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herd for at least one subsequent milking cycle. However, the technique can be used for any dairy cow.

In practical terms, a cow stopper is inserted seven days after a standing heat has been observed.

It is advisable to inseminate the animal in conjunction with a cow stopper, to give the best possible chance of pregnancy.

## How much do they cost?

\* A budget of £70-£100 a cow is standard and will include the price

of the embryo. However, the fee may vary, depending on individual veterinary practice charges and how many cows are being treated.

## Are they suitable for me?

\* Producers are often surprised at how little the technique will cost. The price should be compared with the expense of keeping a barren cow, which can amount to as much as £5/day.

Cow stoppers will usually offer a 30-50% improvement in pregnancy rates, for repeat breeders.